

SPECIAL EDITION

2022 DISABILITY HISTORY ESSAY CONTEST

The SILC is very pleased to share this Special Edition of the IL Edge showcasing the winners of the 2022 Disability History Essay Contest. The contest reinforces WV Disability History Week held the third week of October.

The theme for the contest this year was, "How (insert name of famous person) Has Influenced Me" – Students were directed to choose a famous person with a disability born prior to 1970, discuss the individual, his or her disability and career, and explain how his or her contributions have influenced the student personally and their plans for the future.


Awards are typically presented at High School Senior Awards Ceremonies, which presented a challenge this year. We thank all the high schools represented for working with us and presenting to the winners.

This special edition of our newsletter includes all the winning essays, photos of the authors, and a bit of information to help you get to know these students. In addition to the award certificate, the authors of the winning essays received an engraved personalized key chain and a check for the amount of their award as follows:

State Winner - \$3,250
District 1st Place Winners - \$1,750
District 2nd Place Winners - \$1000

Congratulations to all the winners! I hope this contest continues to motivate high school seniors to not only submit an entry, but to learn more about disability history and how the disability rights movement has changed our world and our lives.

Continue Learning,



Ann McDaniel
Executive Director

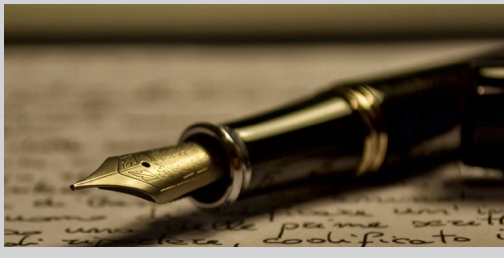
2022 Disability History Essay Contest

This contest gives WV High School Seniors an opportunity to showcase their writing skills, share their knowledge of the Disability Rights Movement and perhaps earn some money to help advance their future!

The contest is a collaborative effort of the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the State Rehabilitation Council, with cooperation from the WV Department of Education and the local schools. The winning essays and their authors are recognized and presented with a check generally at the Senior Awards Ceremony at their respective high schools.

MISSION

"The mission of the WVSILC is to promote the value, equality, full-inclusion, and freedom of choice of all West Virginians with disabilities."





State Winner



Hello, my name is Mattelyn Lamp. I am a senior at St. Marys High School, a member of West Virginia University at Parkersburg's Early College program, the ACT 30 Club, National Honor Society, and I am the historian of SMHS's NHS chapter. I am also a program double completer at Mid-Ohio Valley Technical Institute for both Graphic Design and Multimedia Publishing, a member of National Technical Honor Society, and a MOVTI Student of the Quarter. I was a member of the SMHS Marching Band and Concert Band for three years and was the drum captain for 2 years. In addition, I have been a member of the SMHS Art Club all 4 years of high school.

After I graduate high school, I plan to earn my Bachelor's degree in Media Communications from West Liberty University and work in television and media production.



Mattelyn Lamp St. Marys High School

How Frida Kahlo Has Influenced Me

Frida Kahlo is a surrealist painter who is nothing short of iconic. Her strikingly vivid and thought-provoking paintings tackle her experiences with death, divorce, and disability, and they tantalize artists and collectors alike for decades after her death.

Throughout her life, Frida Kahlo suffered from chronic pain as a result of her physical trauma. Kahlo was born during a time when there was no treatment for poliomyelitis, a virus that attacks the nervous system and causes paralysis in those affected. Kahlo contracted polio when she was six years old, which rendered her bedridden for nine months. Because of this virus, one of Kahlo's legs remained underdeveloped, causing Kahlo to walk with a limp for the remainder of her life. Additionally, when Kahlo was a teenager, a steel rail impaled her spine and pelvis during a cable car accident. Kahlo lived in a full-body cast for three months as a result (Frida Kahlo Biography, n.d., para. 5). During her recovery, she discovered a passion for painting that would blossom into a career as one of the most creative artists of the 20th century.

Kahlo started painting to distract herself from the pain and loneliness she endured while paralyzed. She was provided paints and brushes by her parents, as well as a modified easel that allowed her to paint in bed (Frida Kahlo, n.d., para. 5). She started her journey as an artist by creating self-portraits, which she continued to paint throughout her career. In fact, according to Frida Kahlo Foundation, "of her 143 paintings, 55 are self-portraits which often incorporate symbolic portrayals of physical and psychological wounds. She insisted, 'I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality'" (Biography of Frida Kahlo, 2002, para. 9). Her struggles frequently made their way into her work, as many of her paintings feature surrealist depictions of the physical and emotional anguish that her injuries made her come face to face with. For instance, in her 1944 painting "The Broken Column," Kahlo is shown with her upper body confined to a surgical brace with nails dotting her whole body and a broken column residing in her chest cavity. This painting is a testament to both Kahlo's resilience and her vulnerability, because although she is shown with tears welling in her eyes because of her tremendous pain, she is not laying down in defeat. Another painting that conveys the prominent stressors that Kahlo faced is her 1932 piece titled "Henry Ford's Hospital." Due to the cable car accident, Kahlo was unable to bear children, and she unfortunately miscarried at Henry Ford's Hospital, the namesake of this poignant painting. The painting depicts Kahlo laying in a hospital bed while tethered by umbilical cords to objects such as a fetus, a pelvis, and a snail. When one reflects on the imagery that Kahlo chose to display in "Henry Ford's Hospital," they will note that Kahlo was using the painting to lament the deep resentment and sorrow she felt as a result of her struggle with infertility. The snail represents the slow, torturous nature of the procedure, and as for the mysterious machine located in the bottom left corner of the painting, "It is not a recognizable device so perhaps a question. A body is like a machine, a machine can be repaired, why can my body not be repaired?" (Henry Ford Hospital, 2021, para. 4).

Kahlo rose to fame during the 1940s and 50s, her paintings coveted by many art collectors around the world and showcased in galleries in New York, Paris, and Mexico. As illustrated by Frida Kahlo Foundation, "the Louvre bought one

Nevaeh Ellington

Riverside High School

How Helen Keller Has Influenced Me

Throughout time there have been many remarkable people who have managed to achieve greatness despite things that may have held them back like disabilities. A very famous person who had a disability and still achieved many things in life was Helen Keller, a woman who was both blind and deaf. Although she had many challenges to overcome she became an inspiration for many and to live a purposeful and fulfilling life.

When Keller was young she had an illness that led to her becoming deaf and blind. Despite not being able to learn how to communicate like those with these types of disabilities do today she learned to associate the feeling of an object with words that she would spell out with finger symbols and read by touching words' raised shapes (Britannica, 2021). She was determined to learn and be able to do what others do even though she had to work harder to achieve it. She inspired others with disabilities and became a role model who showed that almost anything was possible when person works hard.

The way that Helen Keller did not allow her disability from dissuading her drive to achieve helped her create history. In 1904 Keller was the first person with deafblindness to earn a college degree and was later nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1953 (Perkin Editors, 2022). She made many achievements that impacted history. Keller also played a very important part in advocating and making a change when it came to the rights of many different people. Her abilities and drive to advocate for others helped to show that those with disabilities deserved the rights that everyone else had and the need to access special tools to get there if needed. She also fought for the rights of women and for them to be able to make decisions for themselves.

Helen Keller was an incredible person whose achievements and impacts are still spoken about today. I chose to write about her because when I was younger I was diagnosed with selective mutism. Although this is not the same as the disabilities Keller had, her ability to work past her own challenges pushes me to not let my fear to speak stop me. I remember learning about her in school years ago and being amazed at all that she did and how she lived a rewarding life despite not many thinking she could. She truly is an inspiration.

References

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2021, June 23). Helen Keller. Encyclopedia Britannica.

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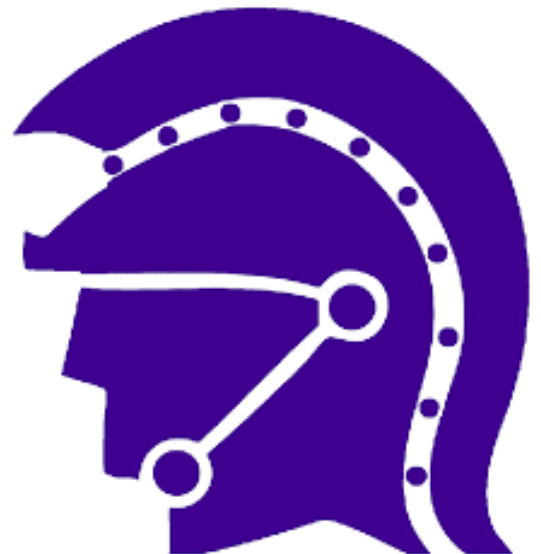
Perkin Editors. (2022). Seven fascinating facts you probably didn't know about Helen Keller.

Perkins School For the Blind. <https://www.perkins.org/seven-fascinating-facts-you-probably-didnt-know-about-helen-keller/s>. ■

District 1 First Place



I am a 2022 Riverside High School graduate. I earned the highest honors award for having a high GPA and the science cord for completing 8 different science classes. Chemistry is my favorite subject and I will be attending Marshall University this fall to major in biochemistry and pre-medical studies. I want to go to medical school to become an anesthesiologist after getting my bachelor's degree. In my free time, I like to crochet and donate the things I make, and spend time with my family and dogs.

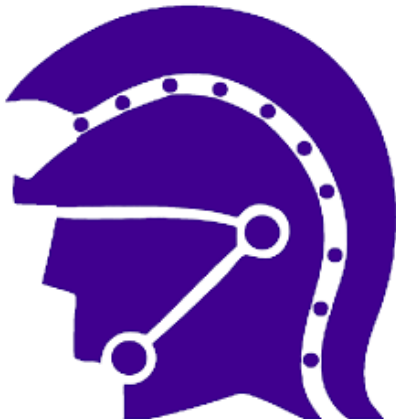




District 1 Second Place



My name is Rylee Vealey and I am a high school graduate of Riverside High School. I run an at home baking business, "Bake Yourself at Home," and plan to pursue my dreams in the pharmaceutical industry. I will be taking prerequisite courses at Bridge Valley and later applying to the University of Charleston Pharmaceutical Program. In the future, I may open my own small business to continue my love for baking. This past year, I have been a member of the National Honors Society, Beta Club, and Prom Committee which involved completing tasks for the school and community service hours. I have previously been awarded the Cindy Bailey Leadership Award, completed Hugh O' Brian Youth Leadership, and received an invitation to the Mu Alpha Theta Math Club at my school. I will be graduating 6th in my class out of 238 students and look forward to what is in store for my future.



Rylee Vealey Riverside High School

How Muhammad Ali Has Influenced Me

Muhammad Ali is commonly known as a legendary heavyweight boxing champion who also fought for social and racial injustice. This social activist along with professional boxer was known as the first fighter to win the world heavyweight championship. Although Ali was a champion for many years, he began suffering from Parkinson's Disease at the young age of 42 along with dyslexia. Muhammad Ali made a big difference in multiple communities and still continue to influence others today.

Early Life

Maher (2018) explains Ali was originally named Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr., and was born January 17, 1942 in a small town of Louisville, Kentucky. Ali began boxing at the young age of twelve when he was invited by a policeman, Joe Martin, when his bike was stolen. Ali took up the offer to begin boxing at the local youth center when he then saw that he had a true talent. Although Ali's schoolwork suffered due to his intellectual disability, he devoted himself along with his time to improve his boxing skills.

Myers (2001) explains that throughout his teenage years, Ali won multiple championships including the national Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and Golden Gloves Championship. When Ali was eighteen years old, he competed in the 1960 Olympic Games winning a gold medal in the light heavyweight division. The boxer worked his way through multiple victories which later was described by one of his handlers as having the ability to "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."

Parkinson's Disease

Matthews (2006) discusses that Ali was diagnosed with Parkinsonism in 1984, three years after his last fight of his boxing career. Tremors in his legs began and increased, slowness of his gait, balance problems, and falls led his neurologist to diagnose him. Throughout his illness, he would say to his daughter Rasheda, "Don't give up. Believe in yourself." Muhammad Ali pushed himself to his limit, motivating others with his greatness leading to his death on June 3, 2016.

Impact on Myself

I first learned about Muhammad Ali my seventh grade year at the young age of thirteen. Learning that this legendary boxer struggled so badly in school due to his learning disability keeps me motivated due to the future this boxer had. Struggling with a learning disability did not stop Muhammad Ali from pursuing his dreams in boxing. Without boxing, Ali could have possibly gave up on school but instead, he had something to fight for. Knowing that one can have such a bright future ahead of them without soaring through school puts me at ease knowing everyone can be successful if they put their mind to it!

Conclusion

Muhammad Ali also fought for racial and social injustice which shows the impact he had on others in society. Ali was such a powerful man to those around him because even after suffering from Parkinson's Disease, he still came back harder and stronger. Muhammad Ali's learning disability pushes

(See Vealey p14)

Amelia Pearson

Buckhannon-Upshur High School

How Craig Sager Has Influenced Me

“Life should be fun, and so should your clothes. It’s not about sending a message. It’s about feeling good about yourself and being who you are,” Craig Sager spoke these words and continued to live by them throughout his battle with leukemia. Sager always had a positive attitude and continued to work until he couldn’t work anymore. Craig Sager was a sports commentator and journalist who worked the sideline at the Olympics, NCAA Tournaments, the PGA Championship, MLB Postseason, and most notably the NBA. Sager changed the game for sports journalists, making interviews and commentating exciting and fun for all listeners.

Craig Sager was born in Batavia, Illinois, in 1951. Sager always had a gift for writing, as in high school, he had an essay published in the Congressional Record. He went on to college at Northwestern University, where he donned the costume of Willie the Wildcat, the school’s mascot. Sager began at the bottom for his start on television, working at small news stations all over the country and making, at most, \$95 a week. He caught his big break in 1981 after covering the Kansas City Royals Spring Training games and the Kansas City Chiefs preseason games. Craig was remembered by his early colleagues as being a “tireless worker” who set up his camera, essentially becoming a “one-man crew.”

Sager moved to CNN, where he manned the first live remote report by the network. He covered the 1980 baseball playoffs before moving to the network full-time in 1981; he also hosted CNN Sports Tonight and College Football Scoreboard on TBS, the sister network of CNN. Sager was put wherever the network needed him to be, as he hosted the 1990 FIFA World Cup, Nordic curling in the 1992 Winter Olympic Games, and covered the NFL in the 1990s. Despite commentating on numerous sports, Sager is iconic for his time covering the National Basketball Association on NBA on TNT. He was a born entertainer, known for wearing gaudy, loud suits. Sager’s work on the sidelines shaped interviews with players and coaches to be intimate and personal, allowing the fanatics to know members of their favorite team better.

In 2014, Sager was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, an aggressive form of cancer. However, he did not let cancer define him. Sager continued to work on his craft and made no excuses for himself. He was still a human, he was not the disease. Sager passed away on December 15, 2016, and was remembered by sports communities all over the world. He was, and is, remembered for his eccentric personality and clothing and his grinding work ethic. Just two days before his passing, Sager was inducted into the Sports Broadcasting Hall of Fame, the most prestigious honor for a sports broadcaster. He also earned the Curt Gowdy Media Award, the Jimmy V Perseverance Award, and his first Sports Emmy Award for Outstanding Sports Personality, Sports Reporter. Sager created an incredible legacy in the world of sports that all sports journalists will aspire to reach. He created the blueprint for a modern-day sports reporter.

Craig Sager’s work ethic has inspired me greatly. My dream occupation is to be the team reporter for a National Hockey League club, and I want to work for it. Sports entertainment is a strenuous, difficult business to be in, but I know if I buckle down and focus on bettering myself, I can accomplish my goal. Sager’s timeline of starting at the bottom and working his way to being an Emmy Award

(See Pearson p15)

District 2 First Place



Hello! My name is Amelia (Katie) Pearson and I am a senior at Buckhannon-Upshur High School in Buckhannon, West Virginia. At B-UHS, I am the Senior Class President, Youth Leadership Association Club President, and the Yearbook Editor. I am also Top 10 in my class and take Dual-Credit and AP Classes. This year, I was a finalist in the Front Office Sports, Sports Industry Professionals Essay Contest and a recipient of a Bronze Presidential Service Award from President Biden. I plan on attending the University of Pittsburgh in the fall with the intention to major in Film and Media Studies to one day become a sports broadcaster for a professional hockey team.





District 2 Second Place



My name is Sydney Brooks. I am planning to attend Fairmont State University this coming fall where I will pursue a degree in Biology. My goal is to further my education in attempts to become a large animal Veterinarian. I am also a first-degree Black belt in the American Karate System. I have been practicing karate since I was five and have recently started teaching. I am top scholar of the graduating class at Lincoln High School and have maintained a 4.0 G.P.A. or higher for the entirety of my high school career. Along with my dreams of becoming a livestock vet I am an aspiring author. My plans are to use my fictitious writing style as a ministry as I continue my walk with God and the people of this planet.



Sydney Brooks Lincoln High School

How Frida Kahlo Has Influenced Me

To be frank, Frida Kahlo is not my favorite artist. I like her work mainly because I can see what people love her for. I understand why she had such a hefty career and can see how her art would appeal to millions, but my taste for art tends to favor Bill Waterson and Faith Erin Hicks. What draws me to Kahlo is less her art and more of her story.

Kahlo contracted polio at a very young age. Her left leg developed a limp resulting in back and pelvic problems. She went on to attend a prestigious school. In a class of 2,000, she was one of only 35 women. She was in her senior year and planning to attend medical school when an accident changed her life. The bus she was riding in collided with a trolley. A handrail skewered her above her left leg and exited through her vagina. Her right leg and pelvis were shattered; her foot, back, and collar bone were all broken.

At this time in her life, Kahlo was on bedrest. A mirror was hung above her, so she had plenty of time to analyze her face and her pain. Her family made a special easel so she could paint while in bed ("Frida Kahlo's Bed"). At this time she was not interested in art, but she had to pass the time. Her first painting was *Self-Portrait in a Velvet Dress* ("Self Portrait in a Velvet Dress, 1926 by Frida Kahlo"). It shows Kahlo standing in front of waves. Her neck is slender and her face is small. She looks more feminine than in her later pieces. Her hair is pulled back in a severe bun. The woman is detailed. Skin, hair, and eyes are painted clearly, but the dress and background are out of focus. This simple painting, and the act of painting it, has proven to me no matter where you are you can do amazing things. During quarantine this year, under very different circumstances but with similar stimulus, I finished my first novel. I was not entirely sold on the fact I could create a work of art so big, but Frida Kahlo's first work has proven to me that no matter where we are we can make art. My first novel is not good. It is messy and full of plot holes. I love it anyway, and I will continue to create.

After Kahlo was freed from bedrest, she went into the pursuit of art. Injury had shown her what she could really do with her hands. However, Frida's hardships were not over. She would marry at age 22, and her marriage would be full of pain. Because of her accident, her pelvis was unable to carry a child to term. She had to have three abortions because of this and suffered countless miscarriages. This may have started the divide between her and her 42-year-old husband, Diego Rivera. Along with their fertility issues Diego and Frida had an open relationship. It became a little too open when Rivera had an affair with Kahlo's sister. This caused more problems than any of their past relationships. The two divorced and remarried a year later. Kahlo once said there are, "two serious accidents of life." The first being the wreck, "The other was Diego. Diego was by far the worst." (Street). Despite this, I still believe she is a worthy role model. She is human, after all, and humans are messy creatures.

As Kahlo grew older her pain worsened; She had thirty surgeries in her life to manage it. Kahlo was put in multiple medical corsets; they did little to nothing. During this time she became known for what art critics would call a surrealist style. She painted herself in pain, and they loved it. Kahlo would go on to say, "They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality." This discussion she opened up about her pain would inspire

(See Brooks p15)

Taylor Osborne

Ritchie County High School

How Walt Disney Has Influenced Me

The American Dream is the ideal by which equality of opportunity is available to any American regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic background. The motto has always been, “Anybody who can dream it can do it.” Despite having dyslexia, dropping out of school, and putting his dreams on hold, Walt Disney lived by this philosophy and was able to achieve the American Dream. He turned his goal of becoming a famous cartoonist into reality and created one of the world’s biggest, most famous theme parks—Walt Disney World.

When I was little, I would wake up around 7 a.m. to watch “Mickey Mouse”, “Wizards of Waverly Place”, and the “High School Musical” movie marathon. All three of these programs shaped me into who I am today and taught me to solve problems, try new things, and not be scared of my dreams. I imagine these are the same beliefs Disney had growing up. At sixteen, he wanted to drop out of school to join the military and fight in World War I, but they rejected him because he was too young and had dyslexia. When he found out the Red Cross Ambulance Corps were accepting people as young as seventeen, regardless of learning disabilities, he used his artistic abilities to alter the birth date on his passport from sixteen to seventeen so that he could serve his country. While overseas, he developed artistic skills by decorating vehicles with cartoons, illustrating posters for the Red Cross, and creating war-related cartoons for a magazine (Lemesh). This inspired me to make illustrations of my own, which sparked a passion for publishing children’s books.

After returning home, Walt Disney capitalized on America’s opportunities and didn’t let his disability hinder his career goals. During the Great Depression, Disney managed to make money by producing Steamboat Willie featuring Mickey Mouse (CDC Radio). Everyone thought it was a sensation, and it showed them there was light at the end of the tunnel. He created over two-hundred productions and thousands of cartoon characters (Philip). He never let anything, including his disability, stand in the way of his goal of becoming a famous cartoonist.

Disney inspired me to go after my dream of applying to an M.D./Ph.D. program despite others telling me it was out of reach. With my M.D., I want to open a psychiatry practice and offer pro-bono services to impoverished families around the world. With my Ph.D., I want to run my own lab studying the anatomical effects of learning disabilities and create technology that improves the educational experience for those individuals. When I retire, I want to teach at a medical school and be a mentor for medical students with learning disabilities like dyslexia and ADHD. As someone passionate about mental health, I want to offer them all the guidance and support they need and remind them that they are not alone.

Despite not having a learning disability, I believe Walt Disney and I are alike in many ways. We love helping others, we’re optimistic, and we did not give up on our dreams. Growing up, Disney productions taught me valuable lessons: to try new things, solve problems in unique ways, and have fun while working towards success. Regardless of having dyslexia, Disney worked hard and became a famous entrepreneur who transformed the entertainment industry. He combined live-action and animation to make a change in the world—this inspired me to write, illustrate, and publish two children’s books. Though I do

(See Osborne p14)

District 3 First Place



Taylor Osborne is a graduate of Ritchie County High School. She will be attending Columbia University in the fall, majoring in Neuroscience and possibly minoring in French Studies. One day, she hopes to attend medical school and become a plastic surgeon. She hopes to travel the world, especially France, and spread her passion for mental health advocacy. She’s aware beauty is often in the eyes of the beholder, but she believes as a plastic surgeon, she can boost people’s confidence, improve their spirit, and enhance their quality of life.





District 3 Second Place



Hello my name is Tommy Charnie, and I am a senior at Brooke High School. I have participated in a great deal of activities throughout my high school career including Cross Country, track, National Honors Society, Spanish club, HOSA club (Health Occupation Students of America), DECA club (Distributive Education Clubs of America), National Technical Honors Society, and Future Business Leaders of America club. I am also very involved in my community and have done many community service projects. For example, for my senior project I was able to raise \$11,100 for my local food pantry. When not doing such activities, I enjoy spending time with friends and family.



Tommy Charnie Brooke High School

How Mr. Thomas D. Hagg Has Influenced Me

A person with a disability who has influenced me would be Mr. Thomas D. Hagg. He did not have worldwide fame. However, he was rather famous in my community. He was born in 1938 and got Polio at a young age. Polio caused him to lose the ability to use his legs. This did not stop him. Mr. Hagg used 2 arm crutches and was able to maneuver. Not only was he able to get around, he was able to become a lawyer and eventually a prosecuting attorney. He spent over 50 years dedicated to helping people and keeping his community safe. His career was only a fraction of how his community benefited from him. He also was married and had several children. The list of community organizations he helped is too great to list for this essay. One place that he regularly volunteered at was the Weirton Community Bread Basket (local food pantry) and even inspired me to volunteer there as well. He was also very active in his church community and emphasized to his fellow members the importance of giving back to the community. He had approached me when we were both volunteering at a church function and he was very interesting and friendly to talk to. He spoke to me for a good while, and solidified the importance of volunteering in my community. I would occasionally see him when I was volunteering, and he always made a point to speak to me and thank me for the work I was doing.

He has definitely influenced me to volunteer, and no matter what I'm going through it is still possible for me to help in some form or another. I am definitely going to keep volunteering all throughout my life and he is partially responsible for inspiring me to do so. I do not have plans to become an attorney. However, his independence and caring nature taught me that no matter how difficult an obstacle may be, it is still possible to overcome. This can be applied to all aspects of life, and I am very thankful for his teachings and being an inspiration to not only myself but to his entire community. ■



Brooklyn Ellison James Monroe High School

How Michael J. Fox Has Influenced Me

“Acceptance doesn’t mean resignation; it means understanding that something is what it is and that there’s got to be a way through it.” a quotation from Michael J. Fox. Michael J. Fox is a powerful figure who has had a significant impact on people in this generation. Since the early 1990s, this strong individual has been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. Since then, he has continued to act while also writing books and establishing a foundation that has raised the prospect of a cure for his disease. Mr. Fox inspires me as someone who aspires to be a neurologist in the future. Even on his darkest days, he maintains a positive attitude and has served as an inspiration to others suffering from a condition similar to his. Michael J. Fox has inspired me, and he gives me even more motivation to help others suffering from similar diseases. Michael J. Fox has influenced others as well as myself because of his positive attitude, hard work, and drive.

Michael J. Fox was born Michael Andrew Fox in 1961 in Edmonton, the capital of the Canadian province of Alberta, to parents William and Phyllis. As a child, Fox was an army child who had to travel with his father, but he considered Burnaby, British Columbia to be his home. Michael J. Fox began his career as an actor, but he soon became an author and activist. He began his career in the 1970s and rose to prominence as Alex P. Keaton on the NBC sitcom *Family Ties*. Following this, his career took off, and he appeared in a number of well-known films. Some of these films include the “Back to the Future” trilogy, as well as “The Frighteners,” “Casualties of War,” and “The Hard Way.” Because of his condition, the actor is considered semi-retired, so in his later years he began to write books. *No Time Like the Future: An Optimist Considers Mortality*, his most recent memoir, will be released on November 17, 2020. In April 2010, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Future*, a collection of wisdom for graduates, was published. *Always Looking Up: The Adventures of an Incurable Optimist* debuted at number two on the New York Times bestseller list in April 2009. It was accompanied by an ABC-TV primetime special that was nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Nonfiction Special; additionally, Fox’s audio recording won the Grammy for Best Spoken Word Album in 2010, an honor for which all three books were nominated. His first book, the memoir *Lucky Man*, was a New York Times and national best-seller in 2002.

Unfortunately, his acting career has suffered as a result of his neurological condition, but he is still working hard to inspire and educate others. Michael J. Fox was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease at the age of 29. Parkinson’s disease is a slow-progressing nervous system disorder that affects movement. Symptoms emerge gradually over time, sometimes beginning with a barely perceptible tremor in only one hand. Tremors are common, but the disorder is also associated with stiffness or slowing of movement. The disease’s final outcome is one of its most heinous aspects. Many people lose hope because they know their condition will only worsen, but Michael J. Fox is not one of them.

Despite his deteriorating condition, he has maintained a positive demeanor. After publicly announcing his diagnosis in 1998, he founded his Foundation in 2000. Fox was diagnosed with young-onset Parkinson’s disease at the age of 29 in 1991, though he did not reveal the news to the public for another seven years. When he revealed his condition in 1998, he became involved in the

(See Ellison p16)

District 4 First Place



Hello! My name is Brooklyn Ellison, a senior at James Monroe High School where I was in the National Honor Society, National Technical Honor Society, Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) where I placed first in the Medical Innovation Competition this spring, Art Club, and my church’s youth group. I am also a Biomedical Science student at the Monroe County Technical Center. Participating in dual enrollment courses at Glenville State University, I will earn my associates degree this summer. I enjoy spending time with family and friends, playing with my pets, and listening to music. I work as a nurse assistant at a local senior living facility and is where I discovered my passion for geriatrics, inspiring me to work as a geriatric neurologist. After graduation, I will attend West Virginia University to study Neuroscience.





District 4 Second Place



I will be graduating from Nicholas County High School with the title of Summa Cum Laude. I have also been a member of NCHS's Student Council from 2018 to present, and National Honor Society from 2021 to present. I have played soccer all 4 years of high school, serving as captain and being elected 1st Team Coalfield Conference my senior year. I have been fortunate to receive a position as a Student Conservation Association Intern with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers out at Summersville Lake this summer. I plan to attend Glenville State University this fall to pursue a major in Wildlife Management, and although I am not completely decided as to what I will do with this major, I am leaning toward the possibility of becoming a Park Ranger. In my free time, I enjoy reading, hiking, kayaking, and just exploring the outdoors in general.



Allie Hanks Nicholas County High School

How Tim Burton Has Influenced Me

I first learned of Tim Burton in my high school art class and then more in my college psychology class. As I learned of this essay, he came to mind and my curiosity grew. Tim Burton is a film director, producer, writer, and artist with a mental health condition. He was born on August 25, 1958 in Burbank, California. It wasn't until my research for this essay that I learned that Burton was never formally diagnosed, but identifies with the condition, Autism, more specifically Asperger's Syndrome. I have learned how he has used his disability to have a positive impact on the world around him.

Although Burton has not been formally diagnosed publicly, he meets the criteria for diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome. His ex-wife, Helena Bonham Carter, strongly believed he has Asperger's after she researched it heavily for a role in a film. Given the backgrounds to all his movies and motives, it does seem evident. There are many people out there fitting this category. Some are worried about the stigma that comes with a diagnosis of a disability and avoid proper care and diagnosis. The fact that he has overcome the obstacles and challenges of Asperger's and contributed positively to society says a lot about his perseverance and determination.

Asperger syndrome is a disorder on the autism spectrum present from early childhood, characterized by difficulty with using language to communicate and form relationships with others. It does not impact cognitive ability, but can affect understanding of social cues. People with Asperger syndrome have an average or above average IQ. Burton was a recluse as a child, lacks social skills, and has an ability to see things others do not....all of which are characteristic of Asperger's.

The Disability Rights Movement is a global social movement that works to secure equal opportunities and rights for all people with disabilities. Activists and advocates work together with similar goals to meet the needs of the disabled while promoting freedom from discrimination, abuse, neglect, and barriers preventing them from living life to the fullest. People with Asperger's syndrome often have their rights violated and lack necessary accommodations to be productive. The Disabilities Rights Movement has helped to meet these needs of people with disabilities.

As a child, Burton spent most of his time as a recluse, enjoying drawing, painting, and watching films. He made his first film in his back yard at just 13 years old. Struggling as an adult, he lacked social skills, but had the ability to see things others do not see which has allowed him to produce several outstanding films. Burton has built a successful life by taking advantage of what his mind sees to make films for the rest of the world to see through his eyes. He is very intelligent, focused, and dedicated.

Burton started his career at "Walt Disney Studios" as an apprentice animator, but wasn't there long due to some differences he had with the executives. He then went on to direct a few short films before moving on to bigger ones like *Battlejuice* and *Batman*. While Burton has had several successful films, *Edward Scissorhands* has been considered one of his best films. Burton says this is his most meaningful and personal film because it portrays his life as a teenager, not being able to communicate effectively with others. Most of

(See Hanks p16)

Cassidy Griffey

Tug Valley High School

How Michael J. Fox Has Influenced Me

“If you don’t have anything to be grateful for, keep looking. Because you don’t just receive optimism. You can’t just wait for things to be great and then be grateful for that. You’ve got to behave in a way that promotes that” (Michael J. Fox). Growing up, I have always enjoyed watching the Back to the Future movies with my family. As a result, when I learned of Michael J. Fox and his battle with Parkinson’s disease, I became fascinated with all that he has been able to accomplish and overcome despite his diagnosis. Fox was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in 1991, and he went public with his diagnosis in 1998. Upon sharing his diagnosis with the public, Michael J. Fox took a step back from his acting career in order to help bring awareness to his disease. This later brought about the creation of the Michael J. Fox Foundation, which has brought awareness to Parkinson’s disease and has raised millions of dollars to help fight the disease since 2000. This foundation promotes research to eventually find a cure for Parkinson’s disease. (“Michael J. Fox” 1; Vivinetto 1)

The perseverance that Michael J. Fox has displayed is what has influenced me the most. To see all that he has contributed to society despite his disease is ultimately something that inspires me to achieve my goals regardless of the obstacles that life throws my way. Being the well-known figure that he is, Michael J. Fox has used his platform and celebrity status in a way that brings awareness to Parkinson’s disease. Many others in Fox’s position may have chosen not to go public with this diagnosis. Did Fox have to publicize his disease? The answer is no. However, without the publicization of Parkinson’s disease through Michael J. Fox, then there would likely not be as much awareness and research about the disease that there is today. Consequently, this is why I chose Fox as someone who has influenced me.

In addition to his perseverance, the optimism that Michael J. Fox showcases is also something that inspires me. As you can see from the aforementioned quote, Fox always looks for something to be grateful for in his life. Despite his disease, Fox remains optimistic about his life and all the blessings that he has in it. This is significant to me because it makes me look at all the things that I have to be grateful for in my life. Because of his optimism, Fox also returned to his acting career later after his diagnosis. As a result, he was nominated for many awards. Without his optimism and perseverance, Fox would have been unable to achieve these recognitions.

To conclude, Michael J. Fox is someone whose strength and courage to persevere over his disability has heavily influenced the person who I am today. Fox’s contributions and actions encourages me to achieve my goals regardless of the obstacles that I face in this life. This is something that I plan to carry with me in my future endeavors because I want to be someone who does not let life’s worries get in their way. Additionally, like Michael J. Fox, I want to always look for something to be grateful for in my life. More often than not, we tend to overlook the little things that we have to be grateful for, and I want to always be grateful for all that I have even when things do not seem to be going my way. I also want to always be optimistic so that I can still create opportunities for myself out of life’s hardships. From this, you can see how influential Michael J. Fox has been to me and how he has influenced the person I want to be as I graduate high school and enter this world.

District 5 First Place



I have been a member of the Tug Valley softball team all four years of high school, and I was named Honorable Mention to the 2021 Class A All-State Softball Team. I am the vice president of the TVHS Student Government, and I am the captain of the academic showdown team. I will graduate with two associate degrees from Southern West Virginia Community & Technical College when I graduate from TVHS. I am a member of the Beta Club and the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. I actively participate in volunteer work and community service through the Tug Valley Area Juniorette Club. I will attend Marshall University as a member of their BS/MD program, which puts me closer to achieving my goal of becoming a doctor.





District 5 Second Place



Marissa Owens is a senior at Cabell Midland High School and she will be graduating with very high honors. While in her high school career, she has remained active in her school by being a part of National BETA Club, being elected into her schools student council, and being a section leader of her high school's orchestra. Not only has she remained active in her school community, but she is a long time member of Elite Performance Academy's competition and company teams. Arts has always been a huge part of her life. She grew up playing the electric bass for a contemporary Christian band 'Going Vertical' and played the violin for her middle school and high school career. Whilst dancing for Elite, she has been awarded multiple platinum placements awards, dance intensive acceptance scholarships, special judges awards, and she was 1 out of the 18 dancers chosen by governor Jim Justice to attend Governors School of the Arts in the summer of 2020. She hasn't just brought home special awards for dance, academically, Marissa has been awarded numerous awards, most recently the ago First Scholarship, the PROMISE scholarship, and she even won the senior superlative of 'Social Butterfly' for the Class of 2022. Marissa plans to attend West Virginia University this fall where she been accepted into the Elberly College of Arts and Sciences and she will be majoring in Biology in hopes to become a secondary education science teacher.

Marissa Owens Cabell Midland High School

How Albert Einstein Has Influenced Me

Growing up with a disability has not been easy as it is more of a curse than it is a blessing. Attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (ADD/ADHD) is defined as a "neurodevelopmental disability" which affects how someone processes information ("What is ADHD"). There are two different types, the inattentive and the hyperactive/impulsive kind.

Every day of my life, I deal with the inattentive type. I have made my way through the hardships it has presented me with; however, I could not have done it alone. The outstanding support from my parents, doctors, peers, and teachers has helped guide me through controlling my ADD. Outside influences, like Albert Einstein have impacted the way I look and feel about my disorder. Einstein is by far one of the most known scientists in the world. His theories have crafted what modern day scientists use today to learn more about astronomy and physics.

Einstein has been the biggest influence on my outlook of ADD and how to use it to my advantage while stepping into my future.

Albert Einstein had one of the most common symptoms of ADHD. It is said he would daydream often, he was extremely unorganized, and he often skipped class. However, the positives to his ADHD are a part of the beautiful way his mind operated. For example, his "big picture insight" helped him make the connection of gravity, time, light, and space. His creativity helped him generate the most used theory in all of science history, The Theory of Relativity.

What relates us is his inattentiveness. It is said that he was "disciplined in school for not paying attention" ("Top Stories"). This is something I have dealt with in the past. Out of all the influencers with ADHD, I chose Albert Einstein for a few reasons. The most important one is how impactful he was on the STEM industry. He defines the science in STEM. As a woman going into the STEM field, it can be intimidating, especially with a disability. Seeing that there are others in the world who have made an impact in the STEM field with a disability gives me hope for the future and what I can achieve.

Einstein sparks motivation in me in hopes that people can look past the disability and see the real potential I possess. My ADD has never stopped me from chasing my dreams, since the day I was diagnosed in fifth grade I never let it be a crutch to me. I have been able to use it more to my advantage. My big picture intellect has helped me problem solve in an abundance of ways. Being able to creatively think fast on my feet in a group setting has helped build my leadership skills. Einstein has inspired me to take charge of my future where I have hopes of becoming a secondary education science teacher. I believe with the way my brain works I can connect with my students and explain things to my students in ways other teachers cannot. My future holds a lot of potential, and whether my ADD is a blessing or a curse, it is a part of what makes me who I am. Learning how to embrace my unique brain and use it for good is a good lesson to learn, especially from such an important individual such as Albert Einstein.

Katelyn Beresic

Berkeley Springs High School

How Louis Braille Has Influenced Me

Most people wouldn't think twice about completing simple tasks such as finding their favorite food at the store or reading their prescription. Unfortunately, that is not the reality for all individuals. Admittedly, I was one of those individuals that took my sight for granted. All of that quickly came to a close by my high school career. I was diagnosed with a rare progressive condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa, which has left me legally blind. Because of this, by my sophomore year of high school, I began learning braille, in addition to learning how to use a white cane. I always saw these shapes made out of dots under signs when I went out in public, but I had no idea what they said or why they were there. Little did I know, I would soon be using those dots to access the world.

Louis Braille was born on January 4, 1809 in Coupvray, France. Louis Braille was not born blind, but instead became blind after an accident at age three in which a sharp tool accidentally injured his eye, resulting in total blindness and sympathetic ophthalmia for the remainder of his life. Although he could not see, he did not allow this to stop him from pursuing his passions. Braille later became a beautiful musician, particularly with his work as an organist. At the age of 16, Braille found himself traveling to the National Institute for Blind Youth, located in nearby Paris, with the help of a scholarship. This led to his most notable creation in following years.

While at the National Institute for Blind Youth, Braille began his journey to learning how to read as an individual on the blind spectrum. His first experience was from Charles Barbier, a retired artillery officer, who used a system of embossed dots that represented sounds. This system was meant to allow soldiers to silently pass notes from one rank to another without alerting the opposing soldiers, similar to morse code. After showing this creation to the army, they were not pleased with the invention, which led Barbier to bring it to the institute for the blind. While it was not perfect, it allowed Braille to build upon his idea and create it into the system we still use today. His system of embossed dots clustered together to represent letters, numbers, and words has been adapted and changed to fit nearly all languages found in the world, allowing individuals varying on the blind spectrum to access the world in a way they never could before. In addition to the gained ability to read words using the braille system, individuals are now able to access mathematics and music through various braille cells. It made a monumental push for more acceptance and accessibility for individuals with handicaps.

Following the invention of the braille system, Louis Braille continued on to become a teacher at the National Institute for Blind Youth, one of the few schools for the blind. He continued to teach his system, as well as published a book explaining the system and how to use it. During all of this, Braille also learned and successfully mastered the art of playing the organ. He continued playing the organ for a local church and was acknowledged for his accomplishments as a musician. Braille died many years later due to tuberculosis, a common disease during that time period. Only two years after his death, the French government, and later the World Congress for the Blind approved the use of this system, naming it braille after Louis Braille. The braille system then became a worldwide format for the use of those with a visual impairment or total blindness. Many young and old individuals continue to actively learn and use braille in their everyday life.

District 6 First Place



I am a graduate of Berkeley Springs High School and the only visually impaired student in general education classes in the entire school. Despite my visual impairment resulting in legal blindness, I am second in my class, an AP student, and recognized as an AP Scholar from my test scores last year. I am a member of the school newspaper, yearbook, theater club, broadcasting club, and gay-straight alliance. I am also a member of National Honors Society and the Secretary of Science National Honors Society. I spend much of my time educating the public about the reality of those with visual impairments, including holding presentations at schools, and working with other visually impaired children. This year, I was chosen as one of 30 individuals chosen for the National Federation of the Blind scholarship, making me the first person in West Virginia to win since 2001.

I plan to attend West Virginia University in the fall. I was accepted into their Mental Health and Addiction Studies major, with plans to minor in Disability Studies and LGBTQ Studies, followed by pursuing a master's degree in Social Work. With these qualifications, I hope to be a Social Worker and Advocate for LGBTQ youth and disabled individuals. My long-term goal is to create a non-profit organization that provides free and/or cheaper fully accessible housing, transportation, therapy services, tutoring for students, and offers support and resources to low-income disabled individuals, as well as LGBTQ youth kicked out of their home due to how they identify. In my free time, I enjoy listening to music, journaling, reading, and spending time with my friends and family.



(Vealey continued from p4)

me to do better each day because if he can do it, then so can I. This should be a motivation to everyone around me including those at school because absolutely anything is possible. Learning disabilities may be challenging and tough to pull through, but those who have them are not alone. Muhammad Ali will forever be a legend to those around him who knew him personally or viewing him from society.

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(Osborne continued from p7)

not see myself making illustrations as a full-time job, I hope to make a change in medicine and help underrepresented students battling learning disabilities. Someday, I want to leave Earth a happier, more magical place as he did.

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(Lamp continued from p2)

of her paintings, The Frame, which was displayed at the exhibit. This was the first work by a 20th century Mexican artist ever purchased by the internationally renowned museum" (para. 11). Furthermore, Kahlo earned many awards during her artistic career. Her painting "Moses" earned her a national prize in 1945, and "The Two Fridas" was purchased by Museo de Arte Moderno in 1947 (Frida Kahlo Biography, Life & Quotes, 2022, para. 15). Although her health deteriorated rapidly during this time, Kahlo was still dedicated to her art, and she stopped at nothing to attend her gallery showings. At her final exhibit in 1953, "she was brought to the event in an ambulance, with her four-poster bed following on the back of a truck. The bed was then placed in the center of the gallery so that she could lie there for the duration of the opening" (Frida Kahlo Biography, Life & Quotes, 2022, para. 16). She died the year following from a pulmonary embolism (Frida Kahlo Biography, Life & Quotes, 2022).

I discovered Kahlo and her brilliant works when I was in middle school; it caused a revolution in the way I paint. I admired her legacy as a trailblazer for surrealism, and I related to her struggles come my junior year of high school because of my battle with chronic nerve pain. I suffered from sciatica as a result from a herniated spinal disc I acquired from participating in the drum line of my high school marching band for two years prior. I was rendered nearly immobile for 11 months, limping from hospital to hospital and growing increasingly frustrated and hopeless because of my pain. When I revisited Kahlo's life story, I drew parallels to my own life: how my colorful yet morose art, inspired by Kahlo's, served as a diversion from my reality. I frequently produced both painted and digital works while I had nerve inflammation, developing my art style through practicing techniques and studying theory. The difference is that while she brought her bed to her galleries in order to be present during her exhibits, I did not attend shows that my art was featured in because I was unable to stand or walk for longer than a minute at a time, and I regret not possessing her same perseverance. Also, Kahlo and I both experienced long-lasting side-effects that lingered after our respective injuries, even after receiving surgical procedures. Months after my sciatica surgery, I still experienced muscle fatigue due to my leg's prior state of constant irritation, and I had to be diligent in my stretching routine in order to regain my leg's flexibility. Now, I am able to walk, run, and lift weights without restrictions, but I will always be cautious of the stress that my body undergoes and take preventative measures to not damage my spinal cord further. Moreover, the physical and emotional hardships I endured, as well as the story of Frida Kahlo, taught me that I am able to overcome every challenge that I come across, even if I believe that my efforts are futile. I continue to use my art as an outlet of expression, which will keep me calm during my college career as I enroll in honors college and work towards my bachelor's degree in Communication and Media Studies with an emphasis in Media Production. I hope to one day work in an environment where I am encouraged to infuse my creativity into my projects and push the boundaries like nobody has ever seen before, just like Kahlo. As I create commercials and direct documentaries, I will remember both Kahlo's tenacity and her ingenuity, and I will strive to embody those same traits in order to be successful in both career and life.

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(Brooks continued from p6)

artist for years. It has certainly inspired me. As I write I have an urge to pull back from the deep, dark, and dangerous. I have an urge to curb my words and soften their blows. Kahlo’s painting The Broken Column is a constant reminder why we should not pull back from pain. It shows Kahlo. She is staring somewhere over the viewer’s shoulder. Carpentry nails pierce her entire left side. Pain is clear across her face. One of her many medical corsets is constricting her, like a snake. She is cracked open from chin to well below her waist. A crumbling pillar is standing where her spine should be (“The Broken Column”). Because of this open honesty about all things terrible, Kahlo thrived.

The next story I share leads me to believe that even if she had decided to chase down a doctorate, we would still know her name. Frida Kahlo only had one exhibition in Mexico, an event she was told she would be in too much pain to even attend let alone host. In response, she had her bed loaded into a truck and taken to the show. She was placed in the middle of the room. Her hair was done to the nines, and not a jewel was out of place. She hosted the entire event.

Kahlo was ambitious, messy, and worth admiring. More important than anything she was tough. She is not called “Heroine of Pain” for nothing. The woman was made of steel, and I hope God gives me the strength and determination Kahlo possessed. A determination that allows me to lay the vital beating parts of myself open and use them as art.

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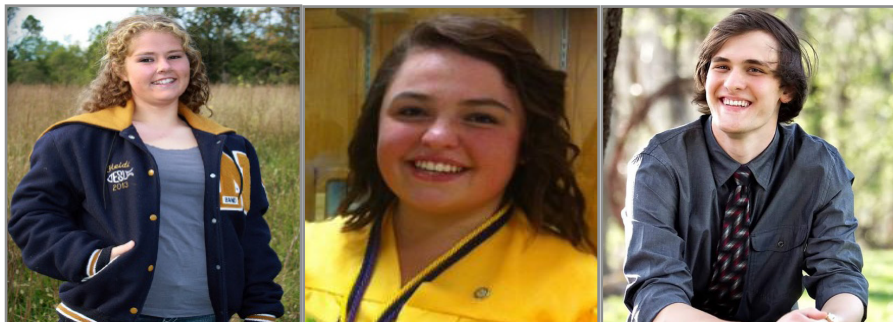
**Heidi
Dennison**
2012 State
Winner



**Alexandria
Rundle**
2013 State
Winner



**Mason
Ryck**
2014 State
Winner



(Lamp continued from p14)

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(Pearson continued from p5)

Winner has given me the motivation that no matter how challenging life can be, I can get past it. Sager was unique and intelligent, two traits sports broadcasters need to obtain. I want to make the world of professional hockey well-known to the general public, whether that be with flamboyant outfits or my sideline personality. Sager has inspired me to be unapologetically myself and to work at my craft until I am proud of it.

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(Hanks continued from p10)

his films focus on a misunderstood outcast. Edward Scissorhands is not just about being an outcast, but also about living with Asperger's syndrome.

Through his hard work and perseverance, Tim Burton has overcome mental and social barriers and produced some of the most creative and influential films of his time. Burton has showed me that despite any doubts and negative connotations associated with having a "label" in today's society, the odds are beatable. I think that Burton's works have been the most influential to me in showing me that there is always a place for each individual's unique ideas and creativity, and sometimes the world can be viewed from other's perspective's than simply my own. I intend to take this knowledge with me wherever I may go in life, in hopes that it will help me to always remain open-minded and keep a sense of creativity.

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(Ellison continued from p9)

campaign for increased Parkinson's research. He established The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research later that year. The Foundation, which is now the world's largest non-profit funder of Parkinson's drug development, has galvanized the search for a cure for Parkinson's disease. He is well-known for his tireless efforts as a patient advocate. Fox has spoken and written extensively about his proclivity to view challenges, including Parkinson's disease, through an optimistic and humorous lens. His message has always been one of gratitude for the support he has received from his fellow Parkinson's patients, as well as hope and encouragement for any decision to take action — no matter how small — to help advance research toward a cure. His determination has been an inspiration to me, and it has influenced the amount of drive I have for my career.

For the past five years, I've been adamant about what I wanted to do with my life. I used to struggle with deciding what I wanted to do until I learned about anatomy and physiology. The nervous system and brain, in particular, piqued my interest and have proven to be among the most fascinating topics to study. My mother was another factor that influenced my decision. My mother was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at a young age, and witnessing her MS journey has influenced both my personal life and my future career. I started accompanying her to her appointments, and actually speaking with a neurologist gave me the assurance I needed that I was doing what I was meant to do with my life. Since then, I've been fascinated by the brain and how it functions. Because of this special interest, I've decided to pursue a career as a doctor. A neurologist, specifically. Last year, I saw a book called "No Time Like the Future: An Optimist Considers Mortality" at Barnes and Noble. I read the back of this book and knew I had to buy it so I could read it. This book astounded me and inspired me with its words and sense of humor. I'd seen the "Back to the Future" movies but had no idea Michael J. Fox had Parkinson's disease. He has handled his condition well and has never allowed it to completely control his life. I was moved by how much he has done to help the disease, such as establishing his foundation. Some people hide from the disease, but Fox has embraced it and used his illness to raise awareness and improve the lives of others by raising money, among other things. Michael J. Fox's determination and ability to embrace his disease has inspired me, and I am excited to be able to help him in the future.

When confronted with life situations over which you have no control, you have the option of reacting negatively or positively. Throughout his life, Michael J. Fox has used his disease to improve the lives of others. Michael J. Fox is a powerful figure who has had an enormous influence on people of this generation. This strong individual has been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease since the early 1990s. Since then, he has continued to act while also writing books and establishing a foundation in the hopes of finding a cure for his disease. As someone who aspires to be a neurologist in the future, Mr. Fox inspires me. Even on his darkest days, he maintains a positive attitude and has served as an inspiration to others suffering from a condition similar to his. Michael J. Fox has inspired me, and he gives me even more motivation to help others suffering from similar diseases. Michael J. Fox has influenced others as well as myself because of his positive attitude, hard work, and drive.

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(Beresic continued from p13)

I was introduced to braille during my sophomore year of high school, after being declared legally blind due to a condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa. Being told that one day I may possibly go blind was a huge wakeup call. For the next three years, I spent hours every month working on learning braille with my teacher of the visually impaired, or TVI for short. It was decided that it would be best for me to begin learning this system so that I could have better access to the world in my future years as my vision progressed. While this all seemed overwhelming at the time, I don't regret it for a second as it led me to discovering what I want to do with my life.

While coming to terms with my visual impairment, I struggled with my mental health. I went through a long period of intense anxiety and depression. While I did have support from social workers and counselors in my school, no one ever fully understood what I was going through. After a while, I decided that rather than pity myself, I would use this experience to help others. By my junior year, I was embracing my visual impairment, educating others on the reality for this community, while also working with others going through the same thing. It became my passion. While researching majors for college, I made the decision to pursue Mental Health and Addiction Studies while minoring in Disability Studies and LGBTQ Studies. My goal is to achieve a bachelor's degree in Mental Health and Addiction Studies, then go on to get my master's degree in Social Work. With these degrees, I hope to become a social worker or mental health counselor in either a high school or hospital working with individuals who are learning to cope with their disability, as well as offer support to LGBTQ youth. My long-term goal is to start my own nonprofit organization that offers free or cheaper accessible housing to low income individuals with a range of disabilities, as well as housing for teens and young adults that are kicked out of their homes because of how they identify. In addition to housing, I would like to supply free adaptive equipment to individuals in financial need. I will soon be pursuing learning ASL to better communicate with individuals, as I already am able to read and write in braille.

With the help of Louis Braille's contributions to the visual impairment community, I was able to find my passion, and I will forever be grateful to him for showing me how I can use my knowledge and personal experiences to help others in need.

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Will you be next?



Blake Huffman
2015 State Winner



Lindsey Beane
2016 State Winner



Lydia Andlinger
2017 State Winner



Hannah Casey
2021 State Winner





WV Disability History Week

Source: [WVDOE](#)

OCTOBER 16, 2006 - Legislation was signed into law on March 8, 2006 designating the third week in October as Disability History Week in West Virginia so that students and the public will have the opportunity to learn more about the history and contributions of people with disabilities.

“This is landmark legislation that shines the light on the contributions and challenges people with disabilities face every day”, said state Superintendent of Schools Steve Paine. Disability can happen any time -- today, tomorrow, next week, or next year. The more children know about disabilities and the current perspectives of people with disabilities, the more likely they will be able to reject stereotypes and outdated ways of thinking.

The bill was created by delegates to the 2005 West Virginia Youth Disability Caucus made up of young people with disabilities ranging in age from 16 to 21. The legislation requires public schools to provide information on disability history, people with disabilities and the disabilities rights movement and encourages colleges and universities to conduct and promote activities that provide education, awareness and understanding of disability history. It also encourages the Legislature to provide recognition through an annual, joint proclamation and to provide resources for instruction and activities.

People with disabilities are increasingly present in America's workplaces, stores, transportation systems and public facilities. They make up an estimated 20 percent of society or nearly 53 million people. And the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has resulted in millions of students with disabilities receiving a public education.

“Students with disabilities are attending regular school programs in increasing numbers”, Paine said. “By focusing on disability history, teachers can encourage a respect for diversity and differences.”

Teachers are encouraged to invite guest speakers to their classrooms, which could be a parent or community member. ■

Disability History: An Important Part of America's Heritage

Source: [US Department of Labor](#)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed by President George H. W. Bush on July 26, 1990. As a result of this landmark legislation, communities and workplaces across the nation have become more inclusive and welcoming for America's nearly 40 million people with disabilities.

Despite the ADA's importance, however, many Americans are unfamiliar with the events that led to its passage. Inspired by the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s and the feminist movement of the 1970s, disability leaders joined forces and took action, holding sit-ins in Federal buildings, blocking inaccessible buses from moving, drafting legislation, and protesting in the streets. And like the broader movements that preceded it, the disability rights movement had its own heroes and champions: Ed Roberts, Gini Laurie and Justin Dart to name a few.

Teaching children about the contributions of particular populations to our nation's history, such as women and people of various ethnic backgrounds, has been recognized as important through the declaration of dedicated months as well as other educational programs. Disability history, however, has been largely ignored in school curricula. This is particularly paradoxical since anyone, regardless of age, race, or heritage, may become a part of the population of people with disabilities at any time. But the tide is beginning to turn—due mainly to the grassroots efforts of young disability leaders.

Promoting Positive Change at the State Level

The youth-led movement for equal education on disability history celebrated its first victory in West Virginia in April 2006, when the West Virginia Youth Disability Caucus was instrumental in the passage of an act establishing the third week in October as “Disability History Week.” This legislation requires public schools to educate students about disability history, people with disabilities, and the disability rights movement and encourages colleges and universities to promote awareness and understanding of disability history. Further, it encourages the legislature to provide recognition of Disability History Week through an annual proclamation and provide resources for instruction and activities.

Other states are following suit. The Florida Youth Council (FYC) is seeking to establish the first two weeks in October as “Disability History and Awareness Weeks” in Florida's public schools. This initiative began when the FYC took its idea to the 2006 Family Café Conference in Orlando, where they met with then Governor Jeb Bush, who agreed to support the effort by issuing an Executive Order. Subsequently, bills have been introduced in both the Florida House and Senate. Florida's youth leaders are now collaborating with youth leaders from other states interested in introducing similar bills.

The North Carolina Youth Leadership Network (NCYLN) successfully advocated for the month of October to be devoted to “Disability History and Awareness.” In March 2007, proposed legislation was filed in the North Carolina House and Senate. To boost the effort, the NCYLN formed a partnership with the Alliance of Disability Advocates Center for Independent Living. With the backing of the disability community and other allies, including the North Carolina Parent Teacher Association, there was significant public support to pass the bill, which

was signed by the Governor in July 2007.

Washington State successfully passed a bill that established October as “Disability History Month” in all public schools. In passing the bill, the legislature stated that “recognizing disability history will inspire students with disabilities to feel a greater sense of pride, reduce harassment and bullying, and help keep students with disabilities in school.” Washington’s bill also requires public institutions of higher education to provide educational activities related to disability history during the month.

Reflecting one of its 2007 legislative priorities, the Idaho State Independent Living Council proposed legislation establishing the third week of October as “Disability History Week,” during which Idaho schools would be required to instruct on disability history, the independent living movement, and disability rights. A con-current resolution making October “Disability History Month” was passed by the State Legislature in March and went into effect shortly thereafter. The resolution encourages education on disability history during October, but does not make it mandatory. Advocates are also trying to integrate disability history into the state curriculum and Idaho Standards Achievement Test.

Educating Tomorrow’s Leaders Today

These and other efforts to integrate disability history into schools and communities reflect one of the key components of effective youth leadership development—learning about the history, values, and beliefs of one’s society. Such youth leadership development experiences correlate with a number of positive outcomes, including decreases in negative behaviors (e.g., alcohol and tobacco use and violence) and increases in positive attitudes and behaviors (e.g., motivation, academic performance, self-esteem, problem-solving, positive health decisions, and interpersonal skills). Youth leadership development activities are similarly linked to increased self-efficacy and the development of skills such as goal-setting, decision-making, and working well with others, attributes essential for success in adulthood and employment—and future advocacy efforts. ■



Signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act

West Virginia Code §18-100-5 Disability History Week

Source: [WV Legislature](#)

(a) The third week of October annually is designated as Disability History Week for the State of West Virginia.

(b) In recognition of and to further the purposes of Disability History Week, each public school shall provide instruction on disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement. The instruction shall be integrated into the existing school curriculum in a manner such as, but not limited to, supplementing existing lesson plans, holding school assemblies or providing other school activities. The instruction may be delivered by school personnel or by guest speakers.

(c) State institutions of higher education are encouraged to conduct and promote activities that provide education, awareness and understanding of disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement.

(d) The Legislature is encouraged to annually recognize Disability History Week by introducing a concurrent resolution to:

- (1) Recognize youth leaders in the disability rights movement;
- (2) Reaffirm a commitment to the full inclusion of people with disabilities in society; and
- (3) Recognize the disability rights movement as an important part of the history of this state and nation.

(e) Recognized resources for information, materials and speakers regarding disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Centers for Independent Living;
- (2) The Statewide Independent Living Council;
- (3) The Developmental Disabilities Council; and,
- (4) The State Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator.

(f) The provisions of this article are not intended to create a burden, financial or otherwise, for public schools, teachers or state institutions of higher education. ■

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